Why stay despite intimate partner violence? Lived experiences of victims in positions of strength

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ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence is a problem in every country worldwide, including South Africa. This qualitative study aimed to gather insights into the lived experiences of victims of intimate partner violence, who were the financial providers in their families and the more stable in terms of careers but remained in the relationships for prolonged periods. Five face-to-face interviews were conducted with individual participants from Pretoria township communities in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then analyzed using the thematic content analysis. The themes generated from the victims' lived experiences explain their disempowerment. The themes that emerged were the aggressor being untouchable, fear for one's life, feeling helpless, desperate and vulnerable, self-blame, and being trapped in the relationship. The experience of being abused, especially by a completely weaker partner, was shattered and associated with a helpless life during the relationship. Therefore, the victims of intimate partner violence need exposure beyond the police and guidance in social work services that can help them seek alternative ways to escape intimate partner violence. People need to be empowered to have courage, to be brave, to have knowledge about resourceful institutions, and to be independent.

Introduction

Almost every community has victims of domestic violence (Woodlock, 2017). Domestic violence seems to have received little or no attention in South Africa during the apartheid years, as there were no specific acts directed directly at it, despite intimate partners reporting cases of abuse at police stations and cases of partner murders occurring at high rates, especially femicide. This condition means that domestic violence has become widespread. When democracy dawned in 1994, the South African government started to pay attention and saw it proper to tackle the problem head-on. As a result, the government introduced and implemented the Domestic Violence Act in the year 1998 to address domestic violence, including intimate partner violence problems, in an attempt to stop partners from abusing and killing each other (Domestic Violence Act, 1998). The government also brought a new phenomenon of protecting every citizen from any form of harassment, but mainly as an effort

to fortify the efforts of the Domestic Violence Act by introducing the Protection from Harassment Act in 2011 (The Protection from Harassment Act, 2011). South Africa still observes domestic violence, including intimate partner violence, in particular, is escalating. With the ineffective justice system for the victims of domestic violence, including intimate partner violence, these two Acts remain ineffective, and the number of victims is bound to escalate. In the meantime, victims of domestic violence, including intimate partner violence, face many life challenges that threaten their physical, mental, and social health, resulting in a higher prevalence of stress and mental instability (Stark, 2012).

Domestic violence occurs in many forms within the domestic sphere. The United Kingdom government defines domestic violence as any incident or pattern of incidents of bullying, controlling, making threats, violence, or abuse of anyone who is, or was, an intimate partner or family member, irrespective of gender or sexuality (Lloyd, 2018). Domestic violence can incorporate forms of emotional, financial, psychological, physical, and sexual, among others (Domestic Violence and Abuse: New Definition, 2018). Being exposed to domestic violence engenders several responses and needs (Etherington & Baker, 2018), resulting in anyone experiencing domestic violence, including intimate partner violence, displaying difficulties in their daily activities.

Intimate partner violence victims experience plentiful challenges and barriers when they want to leave abusive relationships. It seems worse in the case of ethnic minorities and immigrants. Moreover, additional barriers to leaving abusive relationships include institutional racism, immigration laws, culture and religion, issues of cultural competence, and lack of diversity within frontline services (Hulley et al., 2023). Such barriers increase feelings of fear, threat, isolation, and powerlessness. Abusers also further tighten the barriers to extend their reign of terror and control. As a result, victims stay in an abusive relationship or face further threats and consequences if they attempt to leave.

Intimate partner violence survivors need, and some even seek help. An initial step is identifying how intimate partner violence victims employ their sense of individual agency (Waller & Bent-Goodley, 2023). Many intimate partner violence victims usually end up being murdered, while others have to fight to be free from their tormentors. Intimate partner violence can be disastrous to family, children, or new dating partners, and some can even die in resultant homicides (Kafka et al., 2023). In the US, intimate partner violence abusers also sometimes die during law enforcement response to intimate partner violence, and others by suicide after committing homicide.

Intimate partner violence is widespread, costly, and associated with increased morbidity and mortality, with the short-term and long-term effects being on the physical, mental health, and social well-being of those affected and their children (Miller & McCaw, 2019). More research is needed to understand intimate partner violence's various dynamics in different contexts, even though healthcare systems attempt to educate about intimate partner violence, including prevention, identification of intimate partner violence victims, intervention, and recovery. Social and legislative policies related to intimate partner violence exist. Still, intimate partner violence prevails more in women than conditions such as diabetes, depression, or breast cancer, but it often remains unnoticed by health professionals (Miller & McCaw, 2019).

The case of the US shows that after leaving the abusive partners, some victims continue to be victimized, such as nonphysical violence, which affects mental health (Redding et al., 2023). It is common to be stalked, where protective orders have been issued. The abusers often find ways to torment their intimate partner violence victims using many nonphysical ways that have adverse health outcomes, mainly of a mental nature (Redding et al., 2023). Intimate partner violence in Canada, mainly migrants from several countries, showed that the abuser follows the victim even after separation, continuing the abuse (Giesbrecht et al., 2023). Intimate partner violence abuse consists of physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and legal forms. Even after separation, the victims experienced coercive control, isolation, surveillance,

stalking, and harassment. The weakness of these victims was their status as newcomers to the areas, poor social connections, and limited or no English language proficiency (Giesbrecht et al., 2023).

Leaving an abusive relationship is a difficult process for all survivors (Carthy et al., 2023). For men, this can be particularly challenging due to the current knowledge and support for survivors being heavily influenced by a feminist discourse despite a growing body of research that examines men's experiences. This condition raises concerns about how men make sense of abuse, where they seek support for injuries and psychological distress, and what services are available to them to help them move on from abuse. Narrative interviews with 12 midlife and older men (aged 45–65 years) who had experienced intimate partner violence from a female were conducted to explore their journey of leaving the abuse (Carthy et al., 2023). The men's stories revealed themes of how they made sense of what was happening to them (legitimacy as a survivor and self-help), their experiences of service readiness to respond to male victimization (discrimination from police, legal system set up to support women, and service readiness for males), and how men can leave abuse (post-separation abuse and support from friends and family). Implications of the findings demonstrate that many services are still not equipped to support male survivors; therefore, they found it difficult to comprehend their actions as abuse. This condition seemed to have been negatively reinforced by ineffective services and stereotypical beliefs about abuse. However, informal support through friends and family is a powerful tool in supporting men to leave abusive relationships. More effort is needed to increase awareness of male survivors and ensure that services, including legal systems services, are inclusive. It is difficult to leave an abusive relationship, especially for male victims (Carthy et al., 2023). This condition is thought to mean that men assign meanings differently from women to intimate partner violence abuse. Systems have been developed to cater to women intimate partner violence survivors, but there are no platforms and services equipped to support male survivors.

The case of intimate partner violence victims seeking help when trying to leave their abusive partners has been studied among African countries to determine the dynamics of intimate partner violence (Selestine et al., 2023). In Africa, mostly, women are shamed when they leave their partners, even due to abuse. This condition then makes some women stay. In developed areas of Africa, though, victims who attempt to leave often lead to abuser intensifying abuse, making it even more difficult to leave. Fear of further abuse, shame, and acceptance of intimate partner violence often compel the victims to remain in abusive relationships (Selestine et al., 2023).

In cases of most men who are being abused by women, children become the tools of the abuse (Bates & Hine, 2023). While most men find it difficult to leave, those who manage to leave tend to be abused even more, mostly emotionally. Coercive control is usually applied when women force children to alienate from their fathers. Women would manipulate systems such as false allegations against men. Manipulation is often the adverse outcome: direct contract manipulation (such as relocation and contract control), systems manipulation (such as lying in court and school settings), children manipulation, and other varied violence contexts such as controlling, physical, and psychological manipulations. When these happen before the man leaves, he is sometimes unable to leave.

Even though people may question why the abuser abuses or how the victim could be helped, it is more common to ask why the victim does not leave the victim or why they stay in the relationship (Hulley et al., 2023); there are several barriers to safety in an abusive relationship, as leaving can be more dangerous. The common barriers to leaving an abusive partner include considerations for children, connections, pressures, economic necessity, justice system failure, fear, homelessness, hope of change, immigration status, isolation, lacking resources, physical harm, discrimination, shame, lacking shelter, and threats (Femi-Ajao et al., 2020; Kiamanesh & Hauge, 2019; Monterrosa, 2021; Tonsing & Barn, 2017).

Hence, an intimate partner violence survivor needs to consider various factors carefully before reacting to an abusive partner.

Intimate partner violence perpetrators may hurt the children of their victims to punish the victim who tries to leave. Some victims may feel so connected to the tormentor that they do not wish them arrest or any harm. Pressures from family, religion, or culture, and even shame, may also drive the intimate partner violence victim to stay in the marriage. Another factor keeping Intimate partner violence victims in a relationship is when the abuser is the provider of the family, where without the abuse, there cannot be food or other life support. This condition includes victims who lack, such as having no resources, no shelter or home, and are entirely reliant on the perpetrator. The inadequacy of the legal system failing the victims, as the perpetrators, are not punished and they repeat their abuses, causes the victims to stay due to fear. The victims may fear that the actions that the intimate partner violence perpetrators may take against them could lead to retaliation. Hope and belief that the abusive partner may change makes some victims stay. An immigrant who fears deportation may endure intimate partner violence. Some victims may fear being isolated by their associates if they leave an abusive relationship. Fearing to be physically, and threats, harmed often is the reason; isolation and discrimination may also pressure the victim to stay.

In the case of victims of abuse in intimate relationships, the historical difficulty in South African undeveloped communities was that abusers were mainly bullies and thugs who did not have anyone to deal with because of deficient and unproductive legal and social systems. It was also possible for children of rich families to bail the children out of jail when they had been charged for offenses that seem require or warrant jail terms. When democracy dawned in 1994, the system was formalized so that such crimes would be curbed, and legislations were initiated, such as the Domestic Violence Act (Domestic Violence Act, 1998) and the Protection from Harassment Act (2011), among others. These laws were initiated to protect victims (and would be victims), mostly women, people living with disabilities, and children who were seen as being vulnerable, as well as men and anyone who others may victimize.

This study aimed to explore why the intimate partner violence victims, who were selected because they were the ones with financial strength in their relationships, remained victimized but stayed in the relationships for a long time. Moreover, the details of these abuses and the meaning that these victims ascribe to the abuses will be explored. The study also intended to understand the wisdom that informed these victims' decisions to remain in these relationships against the logic that they could easily find better alternatives than to remain in the relationships of perceived trouble for them.

Method

This study was qualitative, with a self-administered interview guide designed to explore the lived experiences of abuse victims in intimate relationships who were major economic contributors in their households, such as earning higher than their partners and contributing more to their families' or relationships' economic welfare. The study adhered to the research ethics, and the researchers undertook the following: the respondents knew of their right to participate or withdraw at any time. They participated by choice, i.e., voluntarily, and their rights were respected. Confidentiality was attempted by not asking for the respondents' names. They knew about the purpose of the study, which was to determine the diverse meanings and experiences of the syndicate members. Anonymity in report writing was adhered to. The respondents also had the right not to respond to sensitive and highly personal issues. The undertaking was that the information derived from the interviews could be used for research purposes and manuscripts of academic journals, as well as by any practitioner, provided that the participants were not indicated by names.

Instrument

Interviews were used to collect the data based on an interview guide. The interview guide consisted of questions, including demographic questions such as age, education, employment, gender, religion, and questions related to intimate partner violence. Are you the higher earner between you and your partner? How significant is the difference between your earnings and your partner's? How does he or she abuse you? How long has this been the case? How do you take it? What does it mean to you? What makes you endure this? Tell more if there is any. These questions seemed straightforward; however, two experts in the public health department of a local university were asked to review the interview guide and then comment and advise on the questions, primarily on the structure of the questions. The instrument was then finalized and presented as a semi-structured interview guide.

Participants

The study participants were recruited with a snowballing method. Five intimate partner violence victims (four females and one male) were purposefully sampled such that they were the main earners in their households or their relationships. The dominance of female victims coincides with most intimate partner violence studies, but those studies presented cases where the victims were from positions of weakness. In this study, these female victims are from stronger positions. The sample size of five meets saturation, as Creswell (2007) endorsed, and the sample size issues in qualitative research are irrelevant (Marshall et al., 2013). Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of this study's participants.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Age (years old)	33	36	46	28	42
Education	University degree graduate	Higher certificate holder	National diploma holder	Bachelor's degree holder	Master's degree holder
Long of married (year)	2	8	17	3	21
Number of children	Two sons	One daughter & one son	Two sons	One son	One daughter and two sons
Employment	employed full-time permanent	working full-time permanent	self-employed (entrepreneur)	worked on fixed-term high, high-earning contract	a full-time permanent employment

Data Collection

Face-to-face interviews were held with the respondents. They were informed about the purpose of the study and an interest in determining their experiences of abuse by their intimate partners, of their right to participate or to withdraw at any time if they decided not to participate any longer. They participated without coercion, with their rights respected and no names required. The respondents also had the right not to respond to sensitive and highly personal issues. They were told that the information was required for research purposes towards a manuscript of an academic journal. Data were gathered about the victims' demographic characteristics, how they were abused, and why they chose not to leave but to remain in those 'unhealthy' relationships. The interviews ranged from 52 to 62 minutes, averaging 54 minutes and 48 seconds, due to probing disparities and having to clarify

questions and explain responses. The previous studies' interviews lasted 45 minutes and about an hour (Azhar et al., 2023; Fillon et al., 2023).

Data Analysis

The study then used thematic content analysis to develop themes around the responses. The thematic content analysis followed a reflexive thematic analysis, a flexible interpretative method to qualitative data analysis to facilitate identifying and analyzing patterns or themes in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2021), as applied by Byrne (2022), with four domains of reflexive thematic analysis as an orientation to data; the focus of meaning; qualitative framework; and theoretical frameworks where each of these reflects orientations to data.

Results

Five key themes emerged from the study. The themes were the aggressor being untouchable, fear for one's life, feeling helpless, desperate and vulnerable, self-blame, and being trapped in the relationship. Reflective explanations of these themes are as follows.

The aggressor being untouchable

This theme emerged from the interviews with some participants. Participants tried to report the violence to the police or the church, but the perpetrators were untouchable. Participant 4 claimed that this abusive man boasted of having killed before but was free, so she found him to be untouchable.

Furthermore, the abuser of Participant 2, who was unemployed, was released each time she reported an incident of violence he had caused her. She informs that he was arrested several times for physically and sexually abusing her and released on warning each time. Moreover, he was untouchable, citing the releases after she reported him and referring to the past when he got scot-free when he had offended the law. She also pointed out that he befriended the police, as former schoolmates, so apparently, the police did not even put him in a cell. She had lost faith in the police as they did not arrest her abuser. She said that he boasted regularly that he was untouchable and that it would be worse if she divorced.

Participant 5, who is a Christian, also felt that his abuser was untouchable, as the priest of their church was on her side. The abuse was more than 25 years, older than the marriage. When he asked for advice from priests of their church, they advised, "Marry her, she will change," not knowing that one priest is also her lover. The abuse was emotional, as she talked and threw insults at ease. The children's paternity was in doubt, but she threatened him with thugs for trying to get paternity tests. The priest was also against the tests. This husband feared her and her associates.

Fear for one's life

Four of five participants reported the fear of one's life. The extent of abuse that participant 1 endured from her abuser was so intense that she felt she would die in the relationship. She experienced so much violence from her abuser that she thought making him angrier would make him kill her. So, by implication, she thought divorce would be immediate death by him. Therefore, she seems to have felt she would die quicker by leaving.

Participant 2 claimed to fear for her life. She claims that she often contemplates poisoning him, but every time she tries, she develops fear. "He will kill me if I fail and he finds out," she remarked. She was sexually and physically abused and feared that the abuser would kill her if she tried to leave the relationship. Participant 3 also feared for her life due to the way her husband shoved her at will. She feels that the physical (wo)manhandling she receives from him shows that he does not care for her welfare or even her life.

Participant 4 was given signals that she had nowhere to go or else she would die if she dared to leave the relationship. She was a high earner who experienced sexual abuse from an abuser who viewed himself as a killer who would kill if abandoned by her. She claimed that he raped and beat her and threatened to kill her if she would dare lay criminal charges against him. She feared divorce because she felt the abuser was going to kill her if she did. She stated that she viewed divorcing this man as meaning death, as "he will kill me."

The feeling of helplessness, desperate and vulnerable

The majority of participants felt helpless, desperate, and vulnerable. They felt helpless as there was no support for them, as Participant 3 indicated to have felt empty and helpless. Participant 2 felt helpless on the law side and avoided putting her own family in danger by even making them aware of her suffering. Moreover, the priest who advised Participant 5 was not supporting or helping him; instead, the priest was aggravating the victimization.

Feeling desperate and vulnerable arose among participants. Participant 1 was beaten when she disagreed with her abusive partner. The abuser also insisted she finances his family but refused to allow her to use her money for her own family. She lamented, "My money feeds his family," "He beats me so hard when I do not oblige," and "He refuses me to help my own family financially." She continued, "My mother died when I finally married him." "He teases me that I killed my mother." Furthermore, Participant 3 felt desperate, empty, helpless, and vulnerable, as there was no one she knew as a relative – except her sons. "I have always wanted to leave, but to where?" she proclaimed.

Self-blame

Two participants reported blaming themselves for the violence they experienced. Participant 1 blamed herself for refusing to listen to her family regarding a known criminal and for her mother's death due to not listening to her advice. She then blamed herself for not listening to her family's advice not to marry a known 'notorious.' She felt guilty for killing her mother. Participant 5, even though he did not pronounce it clearly, somehow seemed to have been regretting the decision that he took from his advisers.

Trapped in the relationship

Four of five participants felt trapped in the relationship. Participant 1 claimed to be imprisoned. Even though she earns much more than her partner and is self-reliant, she could not leave the relationship, and she was the one on whom the abuser depended. The abuse started immediately after they signed at the magistrate, which was only two years. Her family warned her about her husband before they married, as a known abuser and womanizer. "When I insisted on marrying him, they told me never to return home when he abuses me," she said. She stated, "I feel empty, nowhere to run." She was scared to go back home, fearing that the siblings would reject her for not supporting them and for killing their mother. She felt imprisoned in her marriage, and she did it to herself.

The same situation was also experienced by Participant 3, who did not know where to go. She lamented, "If I run, to where?". Participant 4 viewed herself as stranded, and she stated that she felt suicidal sometimes. Participant 5 feared abusing his partner's associates and stayed in the marriage. The explanation was also unpacked to mean he felt trapped in the marriage. He felt that the church and his education had trapped him to behave this weak.

Discussion

All the victims in this study were educated and were financially stronger as compared to their abusive partners. Therefore, even highly educated people can become victims of intimate

partner violence. None of these marriages was new; the victims had been abused for lengthy periods, but they had not divorced or opted out of the relationships. Moreover, in this study, the victims were all in better livelihood conditions than their abusers, as they were all working and were the ones providing for the abuser. This condition provokes the mind to ask, "Why?" Some hints have been given. Participants reported that being trapped in the relationship. No support from family or community, therefore they had no place to run. However, participant had not explored being independent, like finding an apartment. This condition was unlike some US victims who indicated that they had to fight to get out of such relationships (Waller & Bent-Goodley, 2023).

The five respondents were all employed educated, most of them in long-term abuses, financial providers in their households, but being abused at will. This condition contradicts the notion that victims are in a position of weakness (Cai et al., 2023; Machado et al., 2023). Here, the victims had what it takes to be away from their abusive partners. Abuses were from two years to about 25 years. The lengthy abuses can weaken even the strongest victim (Foley et al., 2023). All five victims of this study wished to leave the relationship or marriage but felt trapped. Even though each participant used different terms, such as imprisoned, fear of dying if they divorced or left, had nowhere to go, and trapped. The case of victims feeling trapped is also expounded as the victim fears divorce in anticipation of worse outcomes (Ullman et al., 2023). The negative outcomes that often occur from prolonged intimate partner violence, such as disempowerment (Rosenthal et al., 2018).

All five victims in this study were the major contributors to finances in their households, and thus, none of them stayed in the relationship because of financial dependence. This condition contradicts the common intimate partner violence, where victims fear to leave because of being financially dependent on the abuser (Lin et al., 2023). Instead, the victims seemed that the feared to be killed if they divorced or left the relationship. Facing death is more terrifying than sacrificing wealth (Tobin-Tyler, 2023). Participants reported a fear of being killed by their abusers. Being killed is common when abusers are dumbed, but a case of community collaboration is given as an example where community members save victims from their abusers (Spearman et al., 2023). The fear of being killed is stronger if participants take any action for leaving or divorce the abusers. The killings by victims who left their abusive partners explain and justify the fear of being killed after leaving an abusive partner (Spearman et al., 2023). Especially for a participant who had no home, literally, as an orphan. The vulnerability of orphans who are turned into sex objects because no one protects them makes the orphan feel less traumatized in an abusive marriage than to try to escape the marriage, as the orphanage had released her due to age and marriage (Ngidi & Mayeza, 2023).

The condition even more worse as none to talk to. It may be unsafe to talk, based on the experiences of victims being killed when they laid charges, as the abusers silence the victims and delete traces or evidence of possible criminal offenses (Leigh et al., 2023). This condition was also equated to viewing the police as being ineffective, as the need for the police's possible value in restoring victims' well-being after intimate partner violence abuse (Gasik et al., 2023). This condition means that the victims had lost trust in the police system.

Another condition that lead to staying with the abusers is self blame. The male participant relied on the advisors' guidance, which makes weak as not seem to think. This condition was in line with the lack of self, which in this case happened similarly to cases where Chinese university students were victimized by their intimate partners (Ye et al., 2023). More than anything, the man was in coercive control (McLeod & Flood, 2018), which generally refers to assault, humiliation, intimidation, threats, or other abuses applied to frighten, harm, or punish their victim. This condition means that the victims had no power, or the abusers had more power. There were indications that participants seemed to be under coercive control (Bates & Hine, 2023; McLeod & Flood, 2018). Moreover, the findings concerning participants were also incomprehensible regarding the reasons that led them to marry their abusive spouses, which are denial and refusing advice (Diamant, 2023). These

participants, in particular, seemed also to have compassion for their abusers (Ustunel, 2023), as if by their abusive means, they demonstrated more love. The results seem to contradict sentiments that suggest that victims fear leaving the abuser for fear of losing benefits (Ullman et al., 2023).

The notable forms of abuse include financial, physical through beating, emotional including fear, sexual, verbal, perceived cheating, threats or perceived threats to kill. These forms of abuse are common, as in previous studies (Bhandari & Sabri, 2020; Brown, 2018; Francis & Pearson, 2021; Tchokossa et al., 2018). The fact that these abuses have existed globally over the years indicates inadequacies or failures of strategies and approaches used by the world's different nations. The case where local communities showed resilience and almost won their battles were dismissed as being unlawful, even the cases where communities dealt with abusers who were caught red-handed such as rapists and men who beat their women in public, such as on streets in full view of people (Bengesai & Khan, 2023; Harper, 2023; Kadengye et al., 2023). These cases were even said to have been watched by police who did not intervene but comprehended the retaliating communities (Asif et al., 2023; Biswas, 2022), which caused people to intervene.

Based on this study's findings, intimate partner violence victims need to be empowered to realize the possibility of reporting the police who release their abusive partners without opening criminal cases or investigating thoroughly, counselled for the trauma they could be experiencing, and exposed to social services such as social workers for seeking help with abuses and to be trained as members of the general public in matters of partner violence. At the same time, communities need to be empowered to handle intimate partner violence suspects by handing them over to police and to deal with violent abusers and those resisting apprehension or arrest by the community. Moreover, police need to be empowered to assertively manage even the intimate partner violence offenders that they know. They are barred from releasing abusers without a court order allowing such release.

Conclusion

The study confirmed that staying in relationships with intimate partner violence victims is not always due to being dependent on the abusive partner. Therefore, there is an indication that some decisions were made before getting into the relationships because, from the start, these relationships were already showing to lack tenderness. The study reveals that fear is the foremost reason for these intimate partner violence victims not leaving their abusive partners, especially losing their lives at the hands of their abusive partners, was the summit of all reasons. These victims also indicated some secondary feelings that compelled them to stay in the relationships, which include emptiness, desperation, imprisonment, shame, trapped, vulnerability, and weakness, among others. Fear was shown to be the most apparent form of emotional, intimate partner violence transpiring in this study. Others were reluctant to report the abuses due to a lack of trust in the police services and the shame of being judged. The feeling of lacking power also occurred, and their vulnerability persisted. All these were summed to equate to general disempowerment, even in some formally educated people. The male victim experienced emotional abuse, while the female ones also included emotional, sexual, financial, physical, psychological, social, and sexual forms of abuse. These victims experienced different forms of intimate partner violence, but the reactions of both females and males are the same. They stayed in an abusive relationship, even though none of them stayed because of needing anything from their abusers. Being abused by an intimate partner generated victims' feelings of being desperate, detached, foolish, misunderstood, and weak. Some victims did not get protection when they sought help from the police or religious leaders. Instead, some victims were misled. As a result, there would not be protection in the victims' minds, and they would be aggressed more if they took the initiative to save

themselves or retaliate. Also, the laws to protect them have proven ineffective. The intimate partner violence victims seemed to indicate that they had lost hope in the system that should safeguard them.

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Declarations

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